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ABSTRACT

Distance education in second languages in the United States has grown in a piecemeal, uncoordinated fashion, and it remains marginal to both distance education more generally and to the bulk of foreign language instruction throughout the country. One handicap, arising from very limited demand in business for foreign language skills, is lack of innovative development in industry that advances other distance learning. A major national need for adult-oriented, individual language learning facilities remains unmet, particularly materials and facilities for remediation and maintenance of decaying language skills. Within the formal education system, distance education reaches a small fraction of all language learners and has less impact on current instructional practice than might be expected. To remedy this situation, attention must be given to upper-level skills instruction, production of flexible modules of less than full course length, extension into the less commonly taught languages, provision of opportunities rich in cultural context, and adoption of a common research agenda. (Author/MSE)

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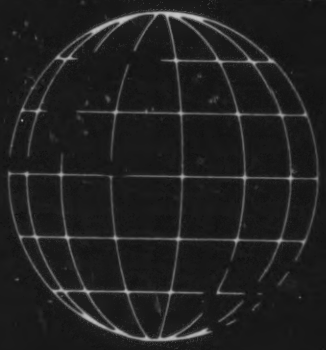

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DISTANCE EDUCATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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June 1991

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About the Author

Richard D. Lambert is director of the National Foreign Language Center at The Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C., professor emeritus of Sociology and South Asian Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and editor of *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. He is author of *The Language and Area Studies Review*, *Points of Leverage: An Agenda for a National Foundation for International Studies*, *Beyond Growth: The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies*, and *The Transformation of an Indian Labor Market: The Case of Pune*, and edited, with Sarah Moore, *Foreign Language in the Workplace*. Dr. Lambert's most recent book, *International Studies and the Undergraduate*, is the result of a massive two-year survey of undergraduate international education in the United States, conducted for the American Council on Education.

About the *Occasional Papers*

This is the ninth in a series of *Occasional Papers* published by the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC).

The NFLC prints and distributes as *Occasional Papers* articles on a wide variety of topics related to foreign language research, education, and policy. The *Occasional Papers* are intended serve as a vehicle of communication and stimulant for discussion among groups concerned with these topic areas. The views expressed in these papers are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NFLC or of The Johns Hopkins University.

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The National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) is dedicated to improving the foreign language competency of Americans. The NFLC emphasizes the formulation of public policy to make our language teaching systems responsive to national needs. Its primary tools in carrying out this objective are:

- **Surveys** - NFLC conducts surveys to collect previously unavailable information on issues concerning national strength and productivity in foreign language instruction, and our foreign language needs in the service of the economic, diplomatic, and security interests of the nation.
- **National Policy Planning Groups** - In order to address major foreign language policy issues, NFLC convenes national planning groups that bring together users of foreign language services and representatives of the language instructional delivery systems in formal education, the government, and the for-profit sector.
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In addition the NFLC maintains an Institute of Advanced Studies where individual scholars work on projects of their own choosing.

The results of these surveys, discussions, and research are made available through NFLC's publications, such as these *Occasional Papers*, and they form the basis of fresh policy recommendations addressed to national leaders and decision-makers.

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Distance Education and Foreign Languages

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Abstract

Distance education in foreign language in the United States has grown in a piecemeal, uncoordinated fashion, and it remains marginal both to distance education more generally and to the bulk of foreign language instruction throughout the country. One handicap, arising from very limited demand in business for foreign language skills, is the lack of the innovative development in the corporate sector that advances other distance learning. A major national need for adult-oriented, individual language learning facilities remains unmet, particularly materials and facilities for remediation and maintenance of decaying language skills. Within the formal educational system, distance education reaches a small fraction of all language learners and has less impact on current instructional practice than might be expected. To remedy this situation, attention must be given to upper-level skill instruction, the production of flexible modules of less than full course length, extension into the less commonly taught languages, the provision of opportunities for interactions rich in cultural context, and the adoption of a common research agenda.

Biography

Richard D. Lambert is the founder and director of the National Foreign Language Center at The Johns Hopkins University. He is professor of sociology emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught for forty years. Before his retirement he taught at Pennsylvania's Lauder Institute of International Management. He has served as an editor of *The Annals* of the American Academy of Political Science for thirty years. His recent publications include *Beyond Growth: The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies; Points of Leverage;* and *International Studies and the Undergraduate.*

Like so many major innovations in educational technology, distance education appears in a variety of settings and is used for a variety of purposes. Such innovations often take on the character of somewhat evangelical social movements. Fed by the enthusiasm of their proponents, they spread crablike through our infinitely disaggregated educational system. They tend to resist any kind of homogenization or attempts at centralized administration, particularly when much of the action lies outside the formal educational system in the corporate and business world, as is the case with distance education. Moreover, what goes under the rubric of distance education is not one but a large number of quite varied technologies. Distance education is used for so many purposes that it is difficult to speak sensibly about the collective enterprise.[1] Here I will direct my remarks to one specific application of distance learning to instruction in foreign languages, making side references to issues that have a broader relevance as they arise.

In this brief article I will be able to address only a limited set of issues. I do not intend here to evaluate the internal operation of programs currently in operation. Such an assessment is clearly needed, but it must be made by practitioners with experience in the actual operation of programs. Readers are directed to the reports of major consortial programs such as those of the Midlands Consortium, especially the Oklahoma State courses in German described by Harry S. Wohlert in this volume; the Russian and Japanese programs of the Satellite Educational Resources Consortium (SERC); the Spanish and Japanese programs of the Educational

Services District in Spokane under the district's Satellite Telecommunications Programming; the North Carolina State Department of Instruction and TI-IN United Star Network, the Massachusetts and New York area's Technical Educations Research Centers system; and Ohio State's telephone language program in Russian and the East European languages. There are also many local programs of interest. This article has another purpose. I want to dream a little as to where we might want to be a decade hence, what our future national agenda might be. Moreover, I want to step outside the frame of reference of distance education itself and set it in the broader context of our national system of foreign language instruction. I want to highlight potential clienteles and the functions that it might perform in the future. I realize that distance education is now very much a market-driven phenomenon, and proposed changes must be responsive to expressed needs and audiences. It is apparent, however, that at least some of the potential of distance education with respect to foreign languages will not be met by strictly following the dictates of current demand. Distance education in foreign languages is a classic case of the lack of fit between national need and market demand. It is also clear that trends in distance foreign language instruction are piggybacking and thus dependent on developments in other fields such as technology, science, and mathematics. If it were to develop in the service of national needs in foreign language instruction per se, it would have a somewhat different character. What follows, then, are some comments on a national agenda for the future as it might look if one started from the perspective of needed national language policy rather than an extrapolation of current trends. I will make only passing reference to hardware limitations, assuming, as is often asserted, that the technology is there once we decide what it is we want to do. There are, of course, considerations of cost that must temper even the most expansive of dreams, but for the moment I will treat these considerations as secondary.

Nonacademic Clienteles

Our national foreign language instructional system[2] can be roughly divided into three parts: (1) foreign language training for direct occupational use in business and government;[3] (2) foreign language education in the school and college system; and (3) foreign language instruction for the general public where the purpose and style of the instruction fall somewhere between the other two parts of the system. For much of distance instruction, training for occupational use contributes a great deal in innovation and resource investment. Moreover, the discipline of measuring the effectiveness of training in the direct utilization of skills on the job helps to hone instructional practice to maximal efficiency.

Business. Training for occupational use, particularly in business, is largely absent in distance foreign language instruction. There are few, if any, distance foreign language programs being used directly in corporations in the United States[4]. The lack of such programs is a reflection of the low demand for foreign language skills in American business in general[5]. This situation of low demand for foreign language training in American business contrasts starkly with Europe, where there is a great deal of activity, leading to the creation of the Occupationally Oriented Foreign Language Section in the Council of Europe, which deals with such activities. The forthcoming unification of the market in Europe will dramatize even further the need for such programs in the European Community. This lack of participation of the corporate sector in the United States in foreign language training in general and in distance instruction in particular is a pity. One would have thought that the capacity of distance teaching to deliver language training directly to widely distributed corporate employees in their workplace, and the ability to deliver it when and if it is needed and fitted to the rhythm of busy employees, would have made it more suitable for business needs than campus-based instruction. To the extent that corporate needs for foreign language training are met now, they are being served by a variety of commercial language schools. In general, such schools are surprisingly low-tech and have little capacity for distance instruction. This is surely a frontier for distance foreign language teaching, one that, if it were well developed, might pay handsome dividends for the field as a whole.

Government. The other major users of occupational foreign language training are the various agencies of the federal government, particularly the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the various intelligence agencies. Like business, they have the resources for experimentation and development in the use of high-technology equipment. Some of the agencies, particularly the Department of Defense, use distance instruction extensively in programs such as the Army Logistics Management College, with its two-way audio courses on the Satellite Education Network,

Defense's Training Reserves Integrated Network System[6], in scattered schools for Native Americans under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and in the Department of Agriculture. As in business, however, they tend not to use distance learning for foreign language instruction. To date, the federal agencies have had a decided preference for on-site intensive training, but this may change, especially within the Department of Defense, as severe budget cuts force them to meet their training needs by contracting for outside services[7]. The incentive to use distance facilities for foreign language instruction along with their other training needs will surely increase. One of the more interesting potential uses of distance language instruction is in the almost unique program managed by the U.S. Army's Foreign Language Training Center, Europe, that serves as a skill maintenance and rejuvenation center for training foreign language specialists serving with various units of the Army in Europe. Since the situation is characterized by dispersed needs and centralized teaching resources, it provides a natural opportunity for distance instruction.

The general public. The needs of the general adult population for foreign language training are even less well met than those of business and government. First of all, given the low status of foreign language learning in the United States, the demand for it tends to be weak, sporadic, and too short-lived to hold learners to the task for the long haul needed to acquire usable language skills. Currently, public demand is met, as is business demand, by enrollment in courses offered by proprietary schools, by the utilization of the low-quality materials available for tourists, or by the employment of native speakers for ad hoc tutorials. In addition, there are a few language courses given on public television such as the highly popular Annenberg/Corporation for Public Broadcasting course *French in Action*, which serves the same public educational purposes in the United States as the British Broadcasting Corporation's language courses or the Open University courses in Great Britain. The success of *French in Action* indicates that there is a market out there, as does Harry S. Wohlert's story, in this volume, of unaffiliated adults seeking to enroll in his University of Oklahoma teledistance course in German. It is possible that greater international exposure of the American public of the kind illustrated by C-Span's plan to internationalize its coverage[8] and to make it multilingual will also increase the demand. No one, to my knowledge, has faced the issue of just what form that demand will take. The fact that Professor Wohlert feels the need to develop a new course indicates that just a replication of current high-school- and college-oriented courses will not do.

Maintenance and refresher courses. There is a clear national need in both the business and the public sector, but also in general adult education, that distance language instruction is ideally suited to meet the maintenance and rejuvenation of skills once acquired. Our entire language instructional process is geared to first-time language learning. Moreover, current courses are not very responsive to partial knowledge in the learner. They assume that the individual is either a complete novice or rests at one of the plateaus in language learning that presumably come at the end of each semester or year. We need a much more finely calibrated system measuring the level of competence of people who have had prior language training or exposure, and we need instructional materials to take them to greater fluency. We also need a system for reinforcing foreign language skills once acquired. Any such service would be immensely useful in occupationally oriented foreign language training as well as serve the needs of the general public. Distance learning is ideally suited to serve this purpose.

An interesting example of an attempt to meet this need is the newly introduced—in March 1990—course in French grammar offered by La Direction de la Formation à Distance (DFD) du Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, *Du français sans faute*.[9] First, a diagnostic test measuring skills in French was mailed to every household in Quebec. Based on the test results, the DFD provided skill portraits to 33,000 test takers and by mid-April had sent out 5,000 learning modules provided by the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Education. Unfortunately, there is no felt need for language competence in the United States equivalent to the importance of French in Quebec, but the general format of public instruction through distance learning tailored to language-skill maintenance and improvement among adults is an interesting prototype.

The Formal Education System

Almost all distance foreign language instruction is directed at and through the formal educational system. Typically, it originates in a land-grant university's school of education or a consortium of universities, although some state governments manage their own. In

addition, there are commercial services such as the TI-IN Network that serve as stand-alone or collaborative providers. By and large, it is directed to high schools, although some university continuing-education divisions provide college-level courses with or without credit.[10]

The first point to be made is that distance teaching or learning, by and large, is marginal to our primary foreign language instruction system. Its explicit rationale—that it provides instruction for students and schools that would not otherwise be reached—is, by choice, a marginal role. Its implicit rule, that it will not compete with or displace existing language teachers and courses, buys it both peace and autonomy. As I will note, it also limits the impact of its technological and pedagogical innovations on the main body of language instruction in the United States.

The marginality of distance language instruction is evident from a brief glance at numbers. No one has counted the total number of students being taught foreign languages at a distance, but it is surely only in the thousands. In 1986-87 there were 4.5 million students enrolled in high school foreign language courses and 1.0 million students enrolled in college courses. Equalizing and expanding access to high-quality foreign language instruction is surely a worthy national goal, as it is in science and mathematics. In the long run, however, the value placed on this function in improving our national system of foreign language instruction depends upon whether we place high priority on a modest expansion in the number of students getting a little bit of language instruction. That is, not only are the enrollments in distance education minuscule compared with the millions of students enrolled in high-school- and college-level instruction, but most courses and enrollments go no higher than the beginning stages of language learning, a point to which I will return. It might be argued that distance education represents the future in foreign language instruction or that the technological and pedagogical implications of distance language learning can have a major impact on the main corpus of foreign language instruction, another point I will deal with later in this article. Nonetheless, as currently constituted, its role is supplemental, not transformational.

Less commonly taught languages. There is one aspect of the marginality in distance foreign language instruction that represents an opportunity to serve one of our major national needs. Instruction in non-Western European languages is a clear national objective. It is obvious to all that if our nation is to enhance our foreign language competencies to enable us to cope more effectively in an increasingly interrelated world, we must expand the number of citizens who have at least a rudimentary familiarity with some of the non-Western European languages. Business as usual, with language instruction dealing almost exclusively with French, German, and Spanish, will not do.

Distance education can make a great contribution to diffusing instruction in non-European languages more widely through our educational system. There are, of course, more than a hundred such languages and it is neither possible nor desirable to try to introduce them all. We have, however, already made a beginning in distance education in two languages: Russian and Japanese. The history of the diffusion of instruction in these two languages through the educational system tells us something about potential future development of distance education in other less commonly taught languages. Russian is the most commonly taught of the less commonly taught languages. Its expansion comes from a perception of national interest rather than increasing student demand, although the recent quantum leap in contacts and student and faculty exchanges may raise enrollment. Until four years ago, Russian was one of the three languages in which national enrollments were drifting downward.[11] The diffusion of instruction in Japanese, on the other hand, is responding to surging student demand and a sudden recognition by public and academic policymakers—curiously, not American business[12]—of the growing importance of Japan. Distance education in Japanese is, in part, a response to the desire to introduce such instruction in many different locations with a very limited and highly concentrated supply of teachers. It also is a way that schools can offer courses in Japanese so long as demand exists and can drop it if demand declines without the pains of staff appointment and dismissal.

Thus the introduction of one or the other of these two languages provides a natural point of entry of distance learning into foreign language teaching. It also raises special problems. What teachers and program administrators are finding in the introduction of Japanese and, to a lesser extent, Russian distance courses is that the pedagogical infrastructure, the agreed-upon curriculum, and the abundance of teaching materials

available to teach European languages are just not available for the non-European languages. At the same time, the problems of teaching a difficult language to Americans when even the functions of language, let alone the content of the language, are so different, are overwhelming even in regular classroom settings. Accordingly, education teachers of Japanese are having to create a curriculum almost de novo at the same time they are trying to adapt to the limitations and possibilities of distance teaching technology. In short, a number of the most important experiments in introducing distance teaching or learning into foreign language instruction have encountered a host of special problems that reflect the limits of our teaching capacity in these languages more generally, rather than limitations on the effectiveness of the technology.

The diffusion of the less commonly taught languages through our educational system illustrates clearly many of the advantages and disadvantages of distance education as a strategy. Hence, let me briefly pursue the question of national policy with respect to the less commonly taught languages. As a nation, we have made an immense investment over the years in creating an academic resource base to teach many of the non-European languages of the world. Viewed from a national perspective, the distribution of instruction in these languages presents an almost classic case for the utilization of distance instruction. Student demand for instruction in, say, Burmese or Twi or Farsi is very widely dispersed and variable while teaching personnel and resources are highly centralized. The creation of a distance learning capacity in these languages would appear to be a natural development. Except for the few Japanese and Russian courses, however, there has been almost no movement in this direction, illustrating very clearly the tension between a national need and the restraints of our demand-driven system. Moreover the fact that these courses are directed almost entirely to high school while the students studying these languages are in college, or, more particularly, in graduate school, shows the limitations in clienteles under which distance education operates. If the development of distance instructional capacities in these low-demand languages is dependent upon current institutional arrangements and must await the arrival of massive student demand, it will be a long time in coming.

Relationship with the main body of foreign language instruction. As noted previously, teaching languages at a distance resides, in the main, outside the mainstream of foreign language instruction in our formal educational system. To some extent, this is also true of other aspects of distance learning. Even the highly successful National Technological University (NTU), an enterprise managed and staffed by twenty-nine leading engineering schools, is supplemental to the main body of engineering education in the United States. While its courses are taught from and by the faculty of different universities, it aims its programs at adult learners—frequently, those already employed in one of eighty sponsoring corporations and government agencies. One of NTU's primary functions is to carry news of cutting-edge research and to provide training to executives and technicians at many different sites. The regular degree programs affected are on each of the participating campuses, and it offers seven different M.S. programs.

Distance foreign language instruction, as noted earlier, does not now serve this need for adult skill maintenance or reinforcement. It operates almost entirely as a supplemental educational mechanism for currently underserved schools and students. Seen from the national perspective, distance instruction operates in a sort of educational ghetto in foreign language instruction, unrelated to and not interfering with the bulk of on-campus language instruction. Its ghetto status is reinforced by a set of attitudes on the part of hundreds of thousands of foreign language teachers who see distance instruction as a possible threat to their careers. Moreover, these teachers are survivors of a series of earlier technological enthusiasms ranging from language labs to computer-assisted instruction, artificial intelligence, and machine translation, and they have developed a healthy skepticism about new high-tech teaching devices—those satellite dishes are viewed as yet another false messiah. In addition, their everyday experience in the classroom convinces them of how essential direct face-to-face contact is in language teaching. Indeed, there is a curious division of opinion in which the specialists in distance teaching or learning believe that distance foreign language instruction is the easiest and most successful kind of course to offer while most language teachers believe it is of very limited use. Language teachers believe that, as indicated by student test scores, courses taught at a distance at best equal classroom instruction and that the transformation costs are not worth the benefits. Nor, from the perspective of school and college administrators, are the cost benefits

of distance education overwhelming, especially when a foreign language faculty is already in place. This is why the teaching of Japanese, and perhaps other less commonly taught languages, is a natural point of penetration; distance teaching of Japanese does not have to displace an existing establishment.

In spite of these semi-Luddite resistances among foreign language teachers, from the national policy perspective, the long-term value of distance foreign language instruction will depend upon its ability to integrate with and influence the general mainstream of language instruction. So long as it spins along as a marginal enterprise it will have limited national impact. To have a broad national impact, in my view, one general organizational shift has to take place, and several different potential functions of distance learning in foreign languages should be emphasized.

One of the major limitations to the expansion of distance foreign language instruction is that it is packaged almost exclusively as a semester - or year - long course. Indeed, the Annenberg/Corporation for Public Broadcasting project that provided funding for much of the experimentation and development in this area is limited by charter to the support of semester - or year - long courses. The full-semester or year-long course format means that either a classroom-taught course is substituted for or it is not. If we abandon the procrustean bed of a full-fledged semester or year-long course, we can think more freely about what role distance learning can play in foreign language instruction. For instance, the instruction can be provided in modular format as a substitute for particular aspects of a course, as a curricular supplement to be used in existing courses, or as "designer" instructional materials delivered to teachers or individual students to be used on demand and responsive to individual needs. If distance education were to add such flexible resources to our general capacity for foreign language instruction, it might have a greater impact on our national teaching capacity than would the current practice of adding courses at the periphery. In addition to breaking the restraints of the full-course format, there are a few additional functions in foreign language teaching that distance education might serve.

Provider of cultural context. Distance education technologies can be the ultimate suppliers of realia that provide constantly refreshed cultural context to language learning. There is now, of course, a huge market in foreign language films, video tapes and discs, and printed realia, some of it already combined into courses. It is not yet possible to reproduce cultural context quite so perfectly as the holodeck on the Starship Enterprise, but theoretically at least, one could technically bring a variety of foreign settings to the classroom. To some extent commercially available video and print materials perform this function now.

The special contribution of distance learning, with its capacity for contemporaneous communication beyond what the relatively static course materials currently provide, lies in the possibility of providing current or very recent materials, of semi-digesting them to meet student learning needs, and of providing for direct interaction with in-country native speakers. There are, of course, a number of experiments in this area already underway. The most common one is pulling off a satellite dish news broadcasts from other countries and in other languages. These facilities provide the motivational stimulus of currency, but they are hampered by the fact that, for all but the most advanced learners, listening to such programs is like drinking from a fire hose. The flood of language reaching the learner in a foreign television newscast is too fast and too massive to be usefully ingested. A variation on this unprocessed flow that has the advantage of recency—but adds a process of semi-digestion—is the Public Broadcasting Service's program *France-TV Magazine*, which is jointly sponsored by the French Foreign Ministry and our Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. It distills a previous month's telecasts into a 60-minute program and provides supplemental print materials which annotate events, cultural context, and linguistic features.

To realize its full potential, distance education in foreign languages must allow for live interaction with native speakers resident in the country where the language is spoken. Some of this kind of interaction exists now, but generally not involving foreign languages. Teleconferences now provide audio discussions on current issues between students in the Soviet Union and students at, for instance, the University of Maryland and Harvard University. These conferences normally take place in English, however. Similar occasions, with interactive video complemented by pedagogical crutches to assist in language learning, would be an immensely valuable addition.

Skill levels. One of the reasons why implementing programs of truly interactive transnational language

learning is so difficult is that so few American students reach a high enough level of competence in any foreign language to use it effectively as a vehicle of communication. Almost all of our instruction, including most especially that given in distance courses, is aimed at beginning levels. This emphasis on the early stages of language learning is characteristic of the entire system. It is almost as if a natural law is in operation, whereby only 50 percent of students finishing a first-year language course go on to take a second year, and only 50 percent of those go on to a third year, and so on. The result is that a lot of students are getting just a little bit of language education and few students outside of language majors stay with a language long enough to acquire useful competence.

This situation limits the full effectiveness and utility of distance language instruction, particularly its ability to use native-speaker interaction as a learning tool. Ironically, it is precisely at the upper skill levels that distance learning can make a unique contribution. The key to raising skills at the upper level is greater spread of what linguists call registers, that is, the many different contexts in which language is used; learning what are called pragmatics, that is, the social meanings of language and the nonverbal cues such as body language that reinforce them; and mastering use of slang, informal language, jargon, and the constantly changing world of idioms. These are forms of language use that mark the near-native speaker. There are few existing courses geared specifically to training for such skill levels. Moreover, the need for specially focused training for upper-level skills is not limited to first-time learners. Such training is precisely what is needed for maintaining skills and upgrading instruction such as that described previously, and for reinforcing and raising the levels of language competence of many teachers.

The provision of instruction aimed at the upper skill levels is ideally suited to distance learning. The students that can use such training are dispersed, and their needs are episodic and individualized. Centralized teaching centers that can provide such training, buttressed by opportunities for interaction with country-based native speakers, could make a major contribution.

Foreign languages and international studies. Over the past three decades, American campuses have developed an immense instructional capacity in what is called international studies. They comprise an array of courses and concentrations dealing with other countries of the world, study-abroad programs, and foreign language courses.[14] It is a curious fact that the links among these three components are quite weak, even on the same campus. In particular, the ties between foreign language instruction and substantive courses about the countries where those languages are spoken—except for literature course—are surprisingly weak. One reason for this situation is the relatively low level of language competence of American students. Another equally important limitation is that it is unrealistic to expect very many of the teachers skilled in the presentation of disciplinary subject matter to have the linguistic competence to teach in another language or even to effectively use foreign language materials. This is an area where centralized distance teaching materials delivered in supplemental modules might begin the process of linking language use to substantive learning in international studies.

Distance Language Education as a Controlled Experiment

In closing, a comment is in order on another way in which distance foreign language teaching can make a major contribution to foreign language instruction more generally. Foreign language pedagogy is becoming increasingly guided by informed research and evaluation that leads to curricular reform and improved teaching practice. Distance foreign language teaching provides some special opportunities for experimental and evaluative research that could not only provide information to guide practice within its own domain but also assist in answering some important questions for foreign language instruction more generally.

There is a great deal of evaluative research already in progress in distance learning. For instance, the Third Annual Conference on Teaching at a Distance was devoted to evaluation, and the proceedings of that conference contain a substantial number of seminal papers on that topic.[15] In fact, several specialized centers devote their attention to the evaluation of distance education. In spite of the fact that the legislation creating the hundred-million-dollar Star School project gave very little attention or funding to evaluation and research, most projects incorporated an evaluation component.[16] Most evaluations, however, deal with structural aspects of distance education other than foreign

languages. When they do deal with language, they tend to consist of questionnaire surveys of student attitudes, censuses of student characteristics, or percentage comparisons of students who took distance versus classroom courses.[17] While providing interesting rationales for the legitimacy of distance learning, we surely need to move beyond that holistic debate. Our research needs to be much more carefully targeted. Few studies are concerned with specific aspects of the teaching-learning process, fewer still with the pedagogical aspects of distance education, let alone with respect to foreign language instruction, and almost none with the important question of how can we go beyond where we are now in both distance learning in foreign language teaching and the relationship of distance learning to the rest of foreign language instruction.

Yet it is such research that provides one natural linkage with the mainstream of foreign language instruction. Distance learning presents a whole set of natural experiments highlighting some of the general issues of the field. Here are a few examples of high-priority research and evaluation projects.

1. There are a large number of organizational innovations in distance learning. For one thing, the light shed on shared teaching resources through the extensive use of consortia and the linking of universities with high schools and corporations should be of general interest. Its organizational style of centralized language expertise with decreasing language competence as one travels through the several organizational layers between the principal teacher, the coordinators, the facilitators, and the student, provides a superb opportunity for determining just what the role of the language teacher is and how language expertise can be most effectively used. This question has important implications for staffing in general. For instance, the style of organization frequently found in large universities—an overseeing professor supervising a number of teaching assistants or native speakers, which sometimes represents another type of distance teaching—is hierarchical rather than spatial. An examination of the experience of distance foreign language instruction might also be instructive concerning how to maximize the usefulness of that scarcest of commodities, the actual interaction time that teachers spend with students both in classroom and in distance learning.

2. The usual mixing of science, math, and foreign languages in the same distance learning organizations allows for a useful examination of the special needs of language learning. Are they different from those two other disciplines? Does language learning's emphasis on learned motor skills, which are often proposed as the principal argument for live interaction between student and teacher, require different pedagogical and organizational strategies? On a campus, administrative and tribal divisions make such comparisons almost impossible. They can be easily managed in distance learning programs.

3. What are the best evaluation and feedback mechanisms for various stages of instruction? The desperate need for distance education to change according to student reactions and the mood of innovation and fresh curricular design make distance learning an ideal milieu for the development of fresh testing and feedback mechanisms.

4. How can the various levels of language instruction be articulated and made into a continuous stream so that students can move through them in a consistent and cumulative fashion? This is a central issue faced not just by distance teachers but by language program administrators in general. It takes on a special importance in distance instruction because of its heavy emphasis on teaching at the high school level, particularly in preparing rural school students for college admission, but it is an issue of major national importance as well.

5. What kind of students best learn what aspects of language skills by which media and in which learning settings? Many distance learning programs, with their special emphasis on reaching schools and clienteles not normally fully served with language instruction, have already discovered that it is the best and the most motivated students who enroll in their courses. The question of why and how to provide language instruction to low-achieving, not highly motivated students with deficient study habits, a question facing all of foreign language education, is right up front in distance foreign language education.

These and many similar questions call for carefully directed and controlled research. Their answers are of major importance both for distance language teaching and for foreign language education in general. Such research can pave the way to a greater integration of distance learning with foreign language education more generally. We currently seem, however, to be too busy doing distance foreign language instruction to spend the time watching closely what we are doing. And alas, as in most of foreign language instruction, there are almost no resources to support such research.

Notes

1 For an excellent recent overview of the full range of distance education, see U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, Linking for Learning: A New Course for Education (Washington, DC: Office of Technology Assessment, 1989).

2 For a discussion of this system, see Richard D. Lambert, The National Foreign Language System, *NFLC Occasional Papers* (Washington, DC: National Foreign Language Center, June 1989).

3 See The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 511, Foreign Language in the Workplace, ed. Richard D. Lambert and Sarah Jane Moore (Sept. 1990).

4 There are some. For instance, the University of Wisconsin's College of Engineering has just begun a program in technical Japanese, which the college is offering to companies as well as individuals.

5 See Carol S. Fixman, The Foreign Language Needs of U.S.-Based Corporations, *NFLC Occasional Papers* (Washington, DC: National Foreign Language Center, May 1989).

6 See Office of Technology Assessment, Linking for Learning, chap. 6, for a review of federal government programs.

7 See Army Training 2007, pamphlet no. 350-4 (Fort Monroe, VA: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1990).

8 See Vincente Pasdeloup, "C-Span's Global Vision," Cable World, 13 Aug. 1990, p.11.

9 See "The Creative Use of Computers in Quebec," Teletraining, 4(4):3-4 (May 1990).

10 For a listing of campus-based programs, see Sue Willis and Susan Bridwell, Directory of Distance Education through Telecommunications: A Directory of NUCEA Institutions Utilizing Telecommunications in Distance Education (Washington, DC: National University Continuing Education Association, 1989).

11 It may be noted that German, the language taught through the Oklahoma State program, is also a language with, at best, stagnating enrollments, and in some schools and colleges it is in danger of replacement by Russian or Japanese.

12 See Bernice A. Cramer, "Developing Competitive Skills: How American Businesspeople Learn Japanese," in Foreign Language in the Workplace, ed. Lambert and Moore.

13 This investment amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars per year. For instance, one federal program alone, Higher Education Act Title VI, provides some $25 million annually in support of graduate-level centers where non-European languages are taught. The universities and states typically invest ten times as much of their own money in such studies. For a review of campus-based programs, see Richard D. Lambert, Beyond Growth: The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies (Washington, DC: Association of American Universities, 1984).

14 See Richard D. Lambert, International Studies and the Undergraduate (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1989).

15 See Evaluation of Teaching/Learning at a Distance (Madison: University of Wisconsin, School of Education, 1987).

16 See, for instance, Toby Levine, "SERC Demonstration Year Fall Profile Reports," mimeographed (Columbia, SC: Satellite Education Resources Consortium, Nov. 1989).

17 There are quite a few studies concentrated on individual learners. See, for instance, Carol Speth, Cherie Mercer, and John Poggio, "Distance Learning by Satellite: The Role of Individual Differences in Processing and Motivation" (Paper delivered at the Sixth Annual Conference on Distance Teaching/Learning, Madison, WI, 9 Aug. 1990).

18 This paper also appears in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 514, Electronic Links for Learning, ed. Vivian M. Horner and Linda G. Roberts (March 1991).